

# How Private Sector Intelligence Units Are Benefiting the Private and Public Sectors

Hunter Pratt<sup>i</sup>, Abigail Edwards<sup>ii</sup>, Sara Soto<sup>iii</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper aims to provide a clearer presentation of Private Sector Intelligence Units (PSIUs) through an exploration of their niche role within the wider discipline of intelligence, as well as an understanding of their functioning and usefulness to corporations. Subsequently, this paper addresses the potentials of PSIUs to ameliorate issues highlighted by the 9/11 attacks in the production and usage of intelligence. These arguments are nuanced by a further section which examines the limits of PSIUs and intelligence cooperation with the Intelligence Community (IC).*

**Keywords:** intelligence, private sector, collaboration, policy, government

## Introduction

Despite the emergence and growth of Private Sector Intelligence Units (PSIUs), academia has largely ignored what has become an increasingly substantial category of intelligence. Unconstrained by the same strict bureaucracy and oversight as state intelligence agencies, PSIUs are pioneers in defining and redefining what intelligence is and what it can achieve. When scholars neglect to address PSIUs from an academic standpoint, arguably many of the nuances and potentials of intelligence are left unexplored. The ramification is the loss of

---

i James Madison University (USA). E-mail: [pratthw@dukes.jmu.edu](mailto:pratthw@dukes.jmu.edu).

ii Columbia University (USA) and Sciences Po. Paris (France). E-mail: [ate2117@columbia.edu](mailto:ate2117@columbia.edu).

iii Universidad Carlos III of Madrid (Spain) E-mail: [sara.sotovela@gmail.com](mailto:sara.sotovela@gmail.com).

derived insight for the academic discourse on intelligence. These discussions can aid the growth of intelligence literature which can potentially benefit the future development of all the various categories of intelligence.

As discussed in this article, Private Sector Intelligence Units can be defined as corporate subunits, which aim to produce intelligence that addresses potential threats to critical aspects of the company including personnel, assets, and brand protection, among other things. Within the private sector, PSIUs are distinct from Competitive Intelligence (CI) which is also produced by corporate subunits, albeit with the contrasted aim of providing information on the relevant market and market competition. At the same time, private sector intelligence in general, and thus subsequently PSIUs, must be differentiated from the Intelligence Community (IC), which is made up of agencies and military commandants with the mission of supporting a state actor.

The advent of PSIUs provides new interesting possibilities to corporations and academia. Through the application of analysis to produce needed information that corporate decision makers lack and cooperation with the public sector, corporations can gain new protections and better safeguard their endeavors. The world is becoming increasingly interconnected with corporations facing new threats that require new solutions. PSIUs offer a solution. Through the use of the foundation laid by its predecessors in other fields, PSIUs have enabled the new field to establish itself quickly without synthesizing an academic foundation. Now, the academic discussion on intelligence can shift its attention to assimilating this nascent category of intelligence into the existing academic world. The quintessential questions of identity, function, and purpose must be answered by private sector intelligence to determine its own identity in the rapidly changing world. This article aims to explore the definition of private sector intelligence, the function of PSIUs, and the benefits of PSIUs both independently and cooperatively. Furthermore, through a discussion on intelligence failures, the utility of PSIUs is illuminated for the benefits of not only the private sector, but also the public sector.

## What is Intelligence (in the Private Sector) ?

The time-honored question of the intelligence world is determining what exactly intelligence is. Intelligence is called the “second oldest profession” on occasion, yet the definition cannot be agreed upon by its practitioners or academics.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the debate is not limited to any one type of intelligence; national security is where the debate has seen the most robust documentation, but competitive intelligence has had contributions to this discussion as well. By learning from the advantages and shortcomings of each, the burgeoning field of private sector intelligence can find its own definition. The benefit of determining private sector intelligence role and identity within corporations